

Who is Jesus?

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[0 : 00] One thing that I find quite tricky when I'm reading the Bible is it's really hard to translate what happens then, back in those times, with what happens today in Melbourne.

But in our passage today, there are two things going on that we see all the time in our city today. The two things are noise about Jesus, noise about Jesus, and hostility toward him.

Noise and hostility. If we ask the average Melburnian who they think Jesus is, lots of different opinions. Maybe he's a good man. Maybe he's a myth.

Lots of, I don't really care. Same goes in the churches, actually. Lots of different opinions, some good, some awful. All of it noise about Jesus.

Hostility as well. You won't find Jesus mentioned publicly anywhere. Not even in some of the churches, actually, which is quite sad. As our culture becomes more godless.

[1 : 00] If you really want to make things awkward socially, just mention Jesus' name in a conversation and see what happens. If you're brave enough to agree with Jesus on certain issues, hostility is what you should expect in this city.

Noise and hostility. Now, back then, just have a look at all the noise about Jesus in our passage. I'm just going to do a quick whistle-stop tour.

I won't do every verse. So verse 12. Here's some noise. Among the crowds, there was widespread whispering or grumbling about him. Some said he's a good man. Others replied, no, he deceives the people.

Verse 15. Halfway through verse 26. Have the authorities really concluded that he's the Messiah?

Verse 31. Still many in the crowd believed in him. Over the page. Verse 40. On hearing his words, some of the people said, surely this man is the prophet. Others asked, he's the Messiah.

[2 : 03] Still others asked, how can the Messiah come from Galilee? Verse 43. Thus, the people were divided because of Jesus. Lots of noise about him back then.

Just have a look at all the hostility as well. The hostility to Jesus started back in chapter 5 when he healed a paralyzed man on the Sabbath. And it said back then, for this reason, they tried all the more to kill him.

That murderous intent is still there in our passage. Verse 1. End of verse 1. End of verse 19.

Why are you trying to kill me? Middle of verse 23. Verse 25. At that point, some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, isn't this the man they're trying to kill?

Verse 30. At this they tried to seize him. And then the end of verse 32. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. Noise and hostility back then, just as it is today.

[3 : 14] And so John's aim for us is that we rise above it all to give Jesus a fair hearing. To give Jesus a fair hearing so that we can believe and have eternal life.

There you go. The context of chapter 7 and 8 next week is the Jewish festival of tabernacles or booths. So every year, religious Jews would make this pilgrimage up to Jerusalem.

And for a week, what they would do is camp in little tents or little tabernacles or booths. What they were doing was commemorating when Israel came out of Egypt back in Exodus.

And they would wander through the desert in little tents or little booths as they went to the promised land. But this year, this year, a very tense festival.

Why? Lots of noise. Lots of hostility as Jesus' ministry grows. That's the context. A very tense festival. The setting of our passage is a courtroom.

[4 : 19] It's a courtroom. There's a defendant, Jesus. The prosecution are the religious Jews. Jesus is charged with healing a paralyzed man on the Sabbath. There are Old Testament laws cited as legal precedent.

And over a dozen witnesses and character references are brought in to the courtroom to testify. And who's in the jury? I hear you ask. You are.

You're the jury. We're going to move really fast through the text. But if you get lost and if you fall asleep, remember, we are in a courtroom today. We're in a courtroom.

And John's instruction to you, the jury, is this. Rise above the noise and the hostility to give Jesus a fair hearing. Okay? There you go.

We're at point number one. And I'm going to read from verse one. Excuse me. After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.

[5 : 19] But when the Jewish festival of tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, leave Galilee. Go to Judea so that your disciples may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret.

Since you're doing these things, show yourself to the world, they say. Jesus' own brothers, his own family, they're the first witnesses to take the stand. They're confused, though, about their brother. They're confused about his agenda. They think Jesus is some fame-hungry politician on the campaign trail. Why don't you leave Judea, Galilee, and go to Judea?

If you want to be a public figure, that's where all the people are at the festival. They're full of noise, you see. Verse 5. For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Therefore, Jesus told them, my time is not yet here. For you, any time will do. You see, Jesus is working to God's agenda, not his brothers.

[6 : 21] God's agenda is one of rescue, not of politics. Jesus' time is not here. His hour, as he says, his hour comes at another festival, the Passover, next year.

He says in verse 7, The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify that its works are evil. This is a really important verse today, because in this verse, verse 7, it sort of hints that there are two sides in the universe.

There's God's side and the world's side. God's side, the world's side. Jesus, naturally, is on God's side, because he's the Son. People, we, are on the world's side.

The world hates Jesus, because he testifies that their works are evil. That's why, everywhere Jesus goes, he experiences hostility, because he's the light from God, you see.

His light exposes the darkness in the world. And the world hates him because of it. He says to his own brothers, it's safe for you to go to Judea.

[7 : 29] The world cannot hate you. And the reason why is because you are just like the world.

You're on their side. That's why they can't hate you. But in verse 10, secretly, after his brothers had left for the festival, he also went up.

Not publicly, but in secret. You see, Jesus is not afraid of the Jews. He's not afraid of people. He's God, after all. But he's just working to a different agenda. To a different, his own timing.

And so John takes us to the temple in Jerusalem, to the festival of the tabernacles. Jesus goes there to teach, as always.

But he keeps getting interrupted by four confrontations. Four confrontations, and they are the second point. Remember, it's like a courtroom. And one by one, noisy and hostile people confront Jesus.

But this is the important bit. I want you to notice how in every confrontation, when people try to interrogate Jesus, he turns the tables on them.

[8 : 38] And he ends up exposing who they are instead. Because he's the son of God, isn't he? So he is not in our courtroom. We are in his courtroom.

He is the judge, not us. So confrontation one, I'll pick it up from verse 14. Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach.

The Jews there were amazed and asked, how did this man get such learning without having been taught? They questioned how Jesus can talk and teach like a rabbi, but he's never gone to school. And here he is turning the tables on them. In verse 16, Jesus answered, My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory. But he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth. There's nothing false about him. The crowd there, the interrogators, they think Jesus is just some false teacher chasing personal glory and all that sort of stuff.

[9 : 48] But he says in verse 17, The reason you think that is because you don't do or know the will of God. He exposes them in verse 19. He says, You don't do the will of God.

Not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me? See, if the crowd, if the crowd were on God's side, if they did keep God's will, they would keep his law.

They would recognize where Jesus' teaching comes from. They wouldn't try to kill him. But they're on the world side, aren't they? That's confrontation one. Confrontation number two, verse 20.

You are demon possessed, they said. Who is trying to kill you? You aren't from God. You're from the devil. Demon possessed. You'd have to be pretty brave to tell God to his face that he's from the devil, wouldn't you?

That's what they did that day in the courtroom. You are from the devil. You're demon possessed, they said. And again, people forget whose courtroom they're in. And so Jesus turns the tables on them.

[10 : 52] Verse 23. I'll pick it up from verse 23. Now, if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath?

Jewish law, for those of you who don't know, Jewish law says that when a baby boy is born, he has to be circumcised on the eighth day. But if the eighth day happens to fall on a Sabbath or a Saturday, you're still fine to proceed and sort of snip away.

But when Jesus healed a whole man's body on the Sabbath, they were outraged instead. And you see how he exposes whose side they're really on?

They reduce God to being some sort of petty legalist. They think God cares more about Sabbath regulations than the fact a whole man's body was healed.

They don't know God at all. Verse 24. Jesus says, stop judging by mere appearances. Instead, judge correctly. If you were on God's side, you wouldn't use worldly legalism to judge me.

[12 : 05] You'd have a godly perspective about things. That's what we see. God's side, the world's side. That's what we see in confrontation three and four. We don't have the time to go into it.

But again, as the people try to interrogate Jesus, they were the ones who end up being exposed. So I want you to notice how in each one, Jesus has the last word.

So end of verse 28. You don't know God, but I know him because I'm from him and he sent me. You're not on God's side, he says. I am. Because those who confront Jesus cannot be on God's side.

That's why in verse 34, final confrontation, he says, you will look for me, but you will not find me. And where I am, you cannot come. God's side, world's side.

And so those are the confrontations. But finally, in verse 37, finally, Jesus gets some clear air to speak. Let's see what Jesus says. This is point three. This is Jesus' own testimony.

[13 : 11] Verse 37. Just so you know, on the last day of the festival of Tabernacles, what they would do was get huge vats of water and pour it over the altar in the temple in Jerusalem.

And what they would do was they were reenacting several Old Testament prophecies which say that water will flow out of the temple. So as they pour these big buckets of water over the temple, the water would flow out and they reenact Old Testament prophecies like the ones on your handout.

So it's one there from Zechariah 14. It says, on that day, the day of rescue, living water, water will flow out from Jerusalem. So they would reenact that prophecy.

And with all that symbolism, on the right day, the big water day, in the right spot, the temple of Jerusalem, Jesus cries out, whoever believes in me, as the scriptures have said, living water will flow from within them.

Water flowing from the temple will happen in me, says Jesus. For those of us who aren't Jewish, which is most of us, if we don't understand these water prophecies, verse 39 is the key there.

[14 : 34] By this, Jesus meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Our Old Testament reading, the first reading that Roger gave us, was one of those Old Testament water prophecies. It says this, it's on your handout. For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground.

I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants. Isaiah says, just as fresh water brings life to people in the desert, just as flowing water is life to people in bushfire country, so too God's Spirit will be life to people in darkness, to people who are dead.

Notice that the Spirit isn't earned by keeping the law or moral performance. None of the Jews kept the law either. The Spirit is for the anyone's.

He's for the whoever's of the world. Whoever believes in Jesus, whoever is on God's side, will be given eternal life. Even if you're Australian or Chinese or Persian or Indian, if you're good or bad, anyone can have eternal life.

[15 : 49] If they believe in Jesus and are given His Spirit. He will be like an endless spring of water to people in the desert.

That's the picture there. You don't need to go to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage. You don't need to keep Old Testament laws. You just need to believe in the Son. And the people hear Jesus' declaration, His own testimony that day, and they are staggered.

Verse 40 over the page. The people are staggered. Verse 40. On hearing His words, some of the people said, surely this man is the prophet. Others said, he's the Messiah.

Still others asked, how can the Messiah come from Galilee? And so John summarizes all the noise in the courtroom that day with verse 43. Thus, the people were divided because of Jesus.

Some wanted to seize Him, but no one laid a hand on Him. And there's one more witness who's going to take the stand. Our last witness is Nicodemus.

[16 : 53] He's our last point today. So Nicodemus takes the stand. Nicodemus is a Pharisee, but he's not like the rest of them. He'd gone to Jesus earlier. We read about him in John chapter 3.

But in verse 51, Nicodemus asks, Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he's been doing? Of all the eyewitnesses in the courtroom that day, John presents Nicodemus as the one to copy.

See, Nicodemus rises above the noise. He stands up to his own legal fraternity. He says, isn't it illegal to condemn a man without giving him a fair hearing?

Don't we need to look at the facts before we condemn him? He reinforces Jesus' own words. Verse 24. Not to judge by appearances, but to judge correctly.

That's Nicodemus. And as we sort of gather all these pieces together, here's the application. So for those of you who aren't Christians, if you're not a Christian here, which will be a few of you, I feel sorry for you.

[18 : 00] Not just because you're going to be judged by Jesus. I mean, I feel sorry for you because of that. But I feel sorry for you because if you're trying to find out who the real Jesus is, there's so much noise and hostility in this city.

Much of it like this courtroom. He's a good man. He's a liar. He's a myth. He's demon possessed. All of it misinformation and noise, confusion from worldly people who refuse to listen because he testifies that their works are evil.

John wants you to rise above the noise to judge Jesus rightly based on his words and his actions.

That's being a Nicodemus. That's giving Jesus a fair hearing. That is how you get to hear about living water, about new life in the spirit, giving Jesus a fair hearing.

For the rest of us who are Christians, which is most of us in the room, we are also to be like Nicodemus. Nicodemus braved the hostility of his age.

[19 : 11] Many times in this passage, people were too afraid to speak up for fear of the establishment and the authorities. Nicodemus stood up to the world. He demanded Jesus get a fair hearing.

He is showing himself to be on God's side. He's showing that the spirit is at work within him. Maybe you experience hostility because you believe in Jesus.

Maybe you experience hostility because your words and actions show that you give Jesus a fair hearing. Maybe what you need is not more peace, but more bravery, like Nicodemus.

Jesus says we should expect hostility. If we're on his side, the world will hate us. It's not that we go looking for hostility. We'd rather live in peace.

But every time we side with Jesus or we give Jesus a fair hearing, hostility is what you should expect in a city like ours. Some hostility will be out and out rejection, maybe even from your own family.

[20 : 19] Maybe that's you here today. But for some of us, hostility will be more subtle. It will be the fact that you're slowly excluded from the center of things.

It's the sneering comments, the sideways glances. It's the comments such as accusing you of being a Bible basher or some holier-than-thou Jesus freak.

All of it is noise. They didn't get Jesus right either. You're in good company. If you do face hostility for Jesus' sake, please be encouraged.

It's a sign you're on God's side. It's a sign that the Spirit is at work in you. But if you haven't experienced any hostility for the last few years, if you're a Christian and haven't experienced any hostility, please can I finish with a challenge?

Why do you think that is? Why do you think you haven't experienced any hostility? It might mean you haven't given Jesus a fair hearing in your words and actions.

[21 : 30] Can I challenge you, especially this Lent, we're always giving up things for Lent, save the chocolate. Why not pray this over Lent? Why don't you pray for more bravery?

Bravery to stand up against the hostility and the noise of the city. That would be a great thing, to pray for more bravery. Why don't we do that now as we finish?